

# Kivalina, Alaska Native Village Statistical Areas (“ANVSA”)

## INTRODUCTION

This memo provides a comprehensive look into the social indicators<sup>1</sup>—constructs to assess, and to measure changes to socio-economic conditions of life for contemporary societies—for the northeastern Alaskan village of Kivalina—which is one of 70+ other Alaskan communities without local police protections<sup>2</sup>.

This memo presents a comprehensive analysis fully contextualizing sociocultural factors like: (1) the importance of environmental climate changes on the village; (2) the volatile dynamics of Kivalina’s population demographics; and (3) atypical domestic functions of Inupiaq households.

## ALASKAN VILLAGES

To date, Alaskan Natives’ makeup roughly 15%, or 115,544, of 731,545 people<sup>3</sup> living in Alaska. Historically, Alaska Natives live in places long inhabited by their ancestors in rural areas in western, northern, and interior Alaska.<sup>4</sup> Many of these Alaska Natives live in villages near the sea or river waters, which they rely on to hunt, fish, and gather wild plants for food.<sup>5</sup> These subsistence activities are intricately woven into the fabric of their lives and form the foundation for continuity between generations by promoting the basic values of Alaska Native culture—generosity, respect for elders, self-esteem for the successful hunters, and community cooperation.<sup>6</sup>

Typically, a coastal or river Native Village typically has a population of a couple of hundred people and generally contains only basic infrastructure—homes; a school; a village store; a health clinic; a church; city or tribal offices; a post office; and a washateria that provides laundry, showers, and toilet facilities for a fee to resident in the village without running water.

Most villages are extremely difficult to access and are not accessible by roads; instead, they have an airport runway adjacent or nearby that provides the only access to the community. While villages on the Alaskan shorelines and riverbanks provide the Natives with access

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<sup>1</sup> JORGENSEN, JOSEPH G., et al. “Social Indicators in Native Village Alaska.” Human Organization, vol. 44, no. 1, 1985, pp. 2–17. JSTOR, [www.jstor.org/stable/44125660](http://www.jstor.org/stable/44125660). Accessed 27 May 2021.

<sup>2</sup> <https://journalistsresource.org/criminal-justice/kyle-hopkins-reveals-alaskan-communities-without-police/>

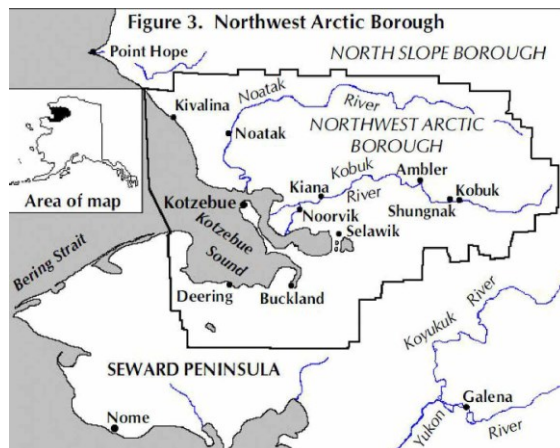
<sup>3</sup> <https://data.census.gov/cedsci/table?g=0400000US02&tid=ACSDP1Y2019.DP05&hidePreview=true>

<sup>4</sup> GAO. “Alaska Native Villages: Limited Progress Has Been Made on Relocating Villages Threatened by Flooding and Erosion”. GAO-09-551 Relocation of Alaska Native Villages (2009); <https://www.gao.gov/products/gao-09-551>

<sup>5</sup> *Id.*

<sup>6</sup> *Id.*

to food, transportation, and recreational and cultural benefits, these locations also present increasing dangers which threaten the inhabitant's ability to maintain a diverse, thriving community.



### *1. The Impacts on Kivalina's Environmental Climate Matters*

The village of Kivalina is located on a barrier island off the Chukchi Sea 80 miles north of the Arctic Circle<sup>7</sup>. Kivalina is an imminently threatened village which has decided to relocate all at once and as soon as possible, since they continue to suffer from flooding and erosion, have limited emergency evacuation options, do not have access to higher ground nearby, and can't move existing structures to these sites or build new structures at the site.

To compel an urgent response from federal and state actors regarding the imminent and persistent environmental threats affecting Kivalina, and more than 200 other Native villages, the Department of the Army, United States Army Corps of Engineers ("USACE"), began working with Kivalina's community, to produce a report identifying site evaluation criteria that considers the safety and social and cultural needs of its residents.

While the village of Kivalina has not yet begun to relocate the community, the environmental impacts that persistently plague Kivalina also continue to negatively impact the growth of its population.

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<sup>7</sup> The Department of the Army, a/k/a US Army Corps of Engineers ("USACE"), "Kivalina, Alaska Relocation Planning Project: Master Plan", <https://www.poa.usace.army.mil/Portals/34/docs/civilworks/reports/KivalinaMasterPlanMainReportJune2006.pdf>.

## 2. *The Volatile Dynamics of Kivalina's Population Demographics*

Contrary to current Census reports, the Maniilaq Association—a local, leading non-profit corporation which provides health and social services to the residents—reports<sup>8</sup> that the general population is about 398 individuals.

The Maniilaq Associations population account is most in line with the USACE's June 2006 Relocation Planning Project which provides an executive summary of Kivalina. Most specifically to Mr. Knox's case, the executive summary reports the current state of the community being home to 402 residents, who live in very *overcrowded* condition in just over 70 homes. Improvements to alleviate overcrowding within Kivalina homes bears significant problems and is impossible and is not recommended due to location, vulnerability to storm surge flooding, overcrowding/lack of room to expand, and funding. Thus, the village and its inhabitants are burdened with non-traditional means in securing its continued survival.



**Kivalina beach erosion facing south (left) and facing north (right)**

## 3. *Atypical Domestic Functions of Inupiaq Households*

The Inupiat household and configurations are volatile and atypical intimate domestic functions. Domestic transitions among Inupiaq households, including changes in household composition, functions, kin networks, and cultural ideologies such as ethics of cooperation, achievement and economic attainment.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.maniilaq.org/northwest-alaska/kivalina/>.

<sup>9</sup> Craver A. Domestic function and Inupiaq households. *Int J Circumpolar Health*. 2004;Suppl 1:49-52. doi: 10.3402/ijch.v63i0.17775. PMID: 15508467.

According to a household survey<sup>10</sup> conducted by Social Transition in the North (“STN”) researchers, although Inupiaq families are opportunistic, flexible, and creative in responding to the challenges of daily life, the younger “middle” generation is often missing because they are residing in other communities either working a wage job or attending school. More so, rarely do members of one household carry out all the social and economic functions needed to sustain the household. Instead, relative or friends from two or more households frequently form social networks that support several households. Thus, domestic functions are divided among a network of kinspeople—people who may live in several separate households and even in separate communities—but who consider themselves related.

Interdependence found among Inupiaq households differ markedly from conditions in most American households, which typically are independent social and economic units. Considering that the Inupiat draw on extended family networks, it is important to account for multi-household networks when analyzing household demographic data. Yet data collection efforts have rarely, if ever, taken this multi-household approach. For example, data-gathering instruments, such as census forms, are designed for the more typical independent, nuclear households of mainstream America.

Throughout the nation, census data are collected and analyzed on an individual or household basis. But when Inupiaq households are categorized as if they were conventional American households, the data collected are often inaccurate and incomplete—because this approach does not account for the Inupiat’s special understanding of household, family, and domestic function. Since standard surveys fail to account for inter-household relationships, some of the most unique and critical aspects of rural Alaska’s domestic economy—the rich and complex economic relationships among cooperating households—are not accounted for and are being ignored.

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<sup>10</sup> *Id.*